FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

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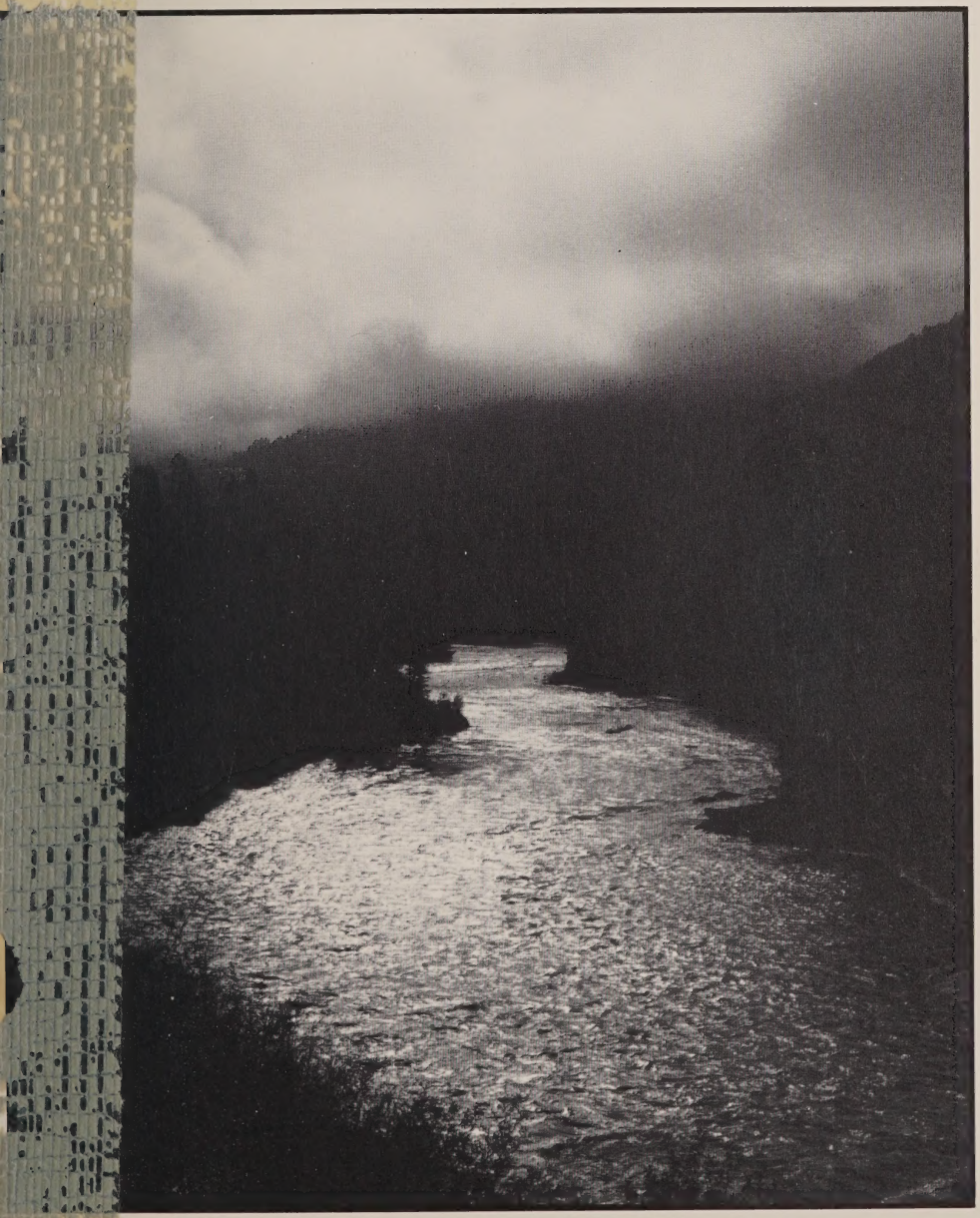

Since 1949 the purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

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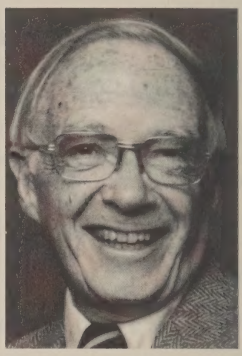
Cover Photograph by Patti Wood Whiteley: Moody River



Arriving in New York City by train or bus and heading uptown is always a test for me of whether I'm "walking the walk" or just "talking the talk." In Princeton, it's not so hard to think of myself as making progress in the practice of loving kindness and compassion; to understand that we are all interrelated; all here to help each other.

And yet . . . and yet . . . Hurrying past the bodies of the homeless men and women sleeping in the concrete corridors of the station, I scarcely reach the street before a ragged, dirty man . . . the first of a series . . . confronts me and asks for a dollar to get something to eat. I don't meet his eyes. I look away, mumble something negative, and go to meet my wife and daughter at a restaurant where we'll spend enough to feed him for many weeks.

Even as I duck away from this man that Mother Theresa would characterize as "Christ in one of his many distressing disguises," I start feeling guilty. Like Saint Paul, I am obliged yet again to say: "For I do not do the good I desire, but rather the evil that I do not desire." Once again, fear and caution and indifference have hardened my heart, blocking off the innate compassion and goodness that lives in each of us and yearns to be let out.

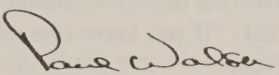
At heart, we all long to break through the walls that separate us from each other and from our true selves. What stops us? Perhaps we feel that we've done our duty by giving to charitable organizations. It's their responsibility to help the poor and sick and homeless, isn't it? And besides, we don't know anything about these people. Probably most of them are alcoholics, or recently released mental patients or, as some of our elected leaders tell us, they'd rather panhandle than work. The head is good at thinking up excuses.

Closer to home, though, what if some organization wants to put "in my back yard" a half-way house for pregnant teenagers or a rehab center for drug addicts? Or what about our ill or elderly parents when they can no longer take care of themselves; do we take them in with us, or send them off to a nursing home? The conflict between head and heart never stops.

At a deeper level, our compassion and innate desire to help others may fail us because we are unable to face our own pain and fear and rage. Carl Jung, one of the chief founders of modern psychiatry, pointed to that probability when he wrote:

> What I do unto the least of my brethren, that I do unto Christ. But what if I should discover that the least among them all, the poorest of all the beggars, the most impudent of all the offenders, the very enemy himself—that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness—that I myself am the enemy who must be loved. What then?

The ability to love and accept ourselves—so that we can love and accept others as ourselves—is a gift of grace that we can only pray for. We cannot summon the power to make us whole again by an effort of the will. What we can do, through prayer and meditation, is to be ready when and if the gift of grace comes to us. Ready to accept, with joy and gratitude, its transforming power to reunite us with our true self and with all of God's creation.



Paul Walsh

Is it possible that the 20th century is ending with the discovery of a new kind of spiritual journey? Newspapers, polls and books suggest that more and more people today are exploring spiritual traditions other than their own while reaching more deeply into their personal religious heritage. Ari Goldman, in *The Search for God at Harvard* (Times Books, Random House, 1991), is a good example of the new trend.

At the age of 36, Goldman took a sabbatical from his job as a religion correspondent for the *New York Times* to enroll as a student at Harvard Divinity School. For two semesters, he took courses in Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, African Religions, and others, and spent long hours over sabbath suppers with professors and fellow students who "opened up . . . about their personal and spiritual lives." At the end of his leave, Goldman's own religious beliefs had been strengthened, not watered down. A seriously committed Orthodox Jew when he entered "The Div School," he was toying with the idea of becoming a rabbi when he went home.

"The best line" from Goldman's sabbatical came from a professor, Diane Eck: "If you know one religion, you don't know any." Eck seemed

Mary Bloom

Ari L. Goldman

to be anticipating the direction of 21st century spirituality with her conviction that the way to appreciate one's own religious roots is to learn as much as one can about other faiths.

The Search for God at Harvard emphasizes that religion "is too important to be taken for granted. (Religion) must be probed, studied, questioned and challenged, for, in the struggle, it comes to life." Learning about other religions can not only bring one's own religion "back to life," it can foster the global understanding needed to stop religious strife and move toward peace on earth.

Mary Ford-Grabowsky

This Holiday Season Give the Gift of "Wisdom, Love, Goodness, and Joy."

Those gifts come in each issue of *Fellowship in Prayer*, says Tod Broderick, of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He writes: "Thank you, thank you, thank you for this beautiful publication. Wisdom, love, goodness, truth and joy envelop me every time *Fellowship in Prayer* arrives at my door."

Many of our readers feel the same way. That's why we suggest *Fellowship in Prayer* as a most thoughtful and loving gift to friends, family, and loved ones in celebration of the holy season that will soon be with us.

Just print their names and addresses and send the list, along with your check, in the envelope inserted in the middle of this issue. A gift card will be sent announcing your gift of *Fellowship in Prayer*, which will begin with the February issue.

Help Those Most in Need of Your Loving Kindness

Another wonderful way to spread joy this upcoming holiday season is to help us distribute copies of *Fellowship in Prayer* to men and women in prisons, hospitals, old age and nursing homes. For every gift subscription you send us, we will add *two* additional copies to our distribution list.

Deep in the sea are riches beyond compare. But if you seek safety, it is on the shore.

Sheikh Saadi

Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God. Every creature is a word about God. If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature—even a caterpillar—I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature.

Meister Eckhart

O, God, give me light in my heart and light in my tongue and light in my hearing and light in my sight and light in my feeling and light in all my body and light before me and light behind me. Give me, I pray Thee, light on my right hand and light on my left hand and light above me and light beneath me, O Lord, increase light within me and give me light and illuminate me.

Attributed to Muhammad

(God) gives the happiness that there is, not the happiness that there is not. To be God—to be like God and share God's goodness in creaturely response—or to be miserable: these are the three alternatives. If we will not learn to eat the only food that the universe grows—the only food that any possible universe ever can grow—then we must starve eternally.

C. S. Lewis

To clasp the hands in prayer is the beginning of an uprising against the disorder of the world.

Karl Barth

There are many joys to old age, but none greater than realizing that finally you are learning about the really important things. Perhaps God reveals some of the Divine mysteries to us at the very end, just before receiving us.

Quoted by Robert Coles

My silence has waited long for You, and even now, in the depths of my soul, no word has ever been uttered, a wholly silent place exists, kept from the Amen of Life Eternal.

Pierre Charles

Call upon God saying, "Things overwhelm me: come to my help."

Noah the Muslim

Creative Uses of Pain

ARTHUR CALIANDRO

Here is inspiring proof of the spiritual and emotional power in each of us that makes it possible to grow through suffering.

Nobody likes pain, and yet is there anybody alive who has not experienced or is not now experiencing some kind of pain? All of us have been to the place where we say about life, "It just hurts." There is sadness, turmoil, fear, a grumbling of the soul. Pain is one of the givens of life.

What can we do about it? Let me describe briefly the profiles of two people who are members of our congregation at Marble Collegiate Church. I know each of them very well.

One day after a meeting, one of these people, a woman, cornered me and said, "Arthur, it has finally happened! I must make an appointment with you so that I can catch you up on my life." I could tell there was something different about her because, for the entire twenty-four years I have known her in this church, she had always seemed to be going through life dragging a ball and chain, despite the fact that she was well-bred, articulate, intelligent and attractive. So I was eager to hear what she had to tell me when she came into the church office several weeks later.

The woman, who is in her middle fifties, radiated an inner joy as she told me of the wonderful breakthrough she had experienced. Everything had come together: relationships, career, her whole sense of self. And how did she achieve it? It came in three parts.

First, this woman has always seen her life as part of a spiritual pilgrimage, with God a part of it. She knows that God gave her the gift of life—God was there at the beginning and will be there at the end. God has been mixed in her life all the way through, not always clearly, not always easily, but there.

Second, she got in touch with her feelings. Over a period of time she went to a therapist to work through her problems, to unravel all the

A member of the Board of Trustees of Fellowship in Prayer, Rev. Dr. Arthur Caliandro is senior minister of New York's Marble Collegiate Church. As the successor to Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, he is the 46th minister at Marble in a line that began in 1628. His sermons attract a wide audience on radio and cable TV shows across the country. Dr. Caliandro's latest book is Make Your Life Count.

knots and straighten out her confused thinking. That's something most intelligent people resist. When we have a physical ache or pain we go to the doctor, but when the pain is spiritual, mental or emotional, we are too proud to ask for help. But she asked.

And the lesson she learned was one she wanted me to pass on to others: "You must tell the people that it is never too late, you never get too old. Regardless of how old you are, things can come together for you, but you have to stay with it."

The other woman is quite different. When I first met her twenty years

Rev. Dr. Arthur Caliandro

ago, I wouldn't have given, as they say, a plug nickel for her happiness. As a child she had not received much love or encouragement and when she was barely old enough she was thrust out into the world and told, "You are on your own."

Twenty years ago she found her way to this church. At the time, she was groveling in self-pity, complaining that nobody loved her, not her parents, not her brother, not her sister—nobody. "Nobody cares for me," she would say. "Nobody wants to give me a chance."

I remember clearly one afternoon she phoned to talk about her prob-

"Pain itself is not creative, but anybody who has ever been really creative in life has had a lot of pain and has learned how to adjust and to adapt and to overcome."

lems, and she was doing her self-pity thing, going around and around and around, as if it were her favorite toy. Finally I told her, "Look, we're not getting anywhere if that is your attitude. Unless you change your line of talk, I am going to hang up."

She kept going, so I hung up. I know it sounds cruel, and I surprised myself by doing it, but I hung up. And then the phone rang again, and she said, "You hung up on me!"

"Yes," I said, "I hung up on you. You are never going to get anywhere as long as you are mired in self-pity."

But today she is as fulfilled a woman as anyone I know. She is not making a lot of money, but she is doing what she wants to do, what she was called to do. What was her process? She saw her life, and she still sees her life, as a spiritual journey, with God there at the beginning, at the end and in between. She had enough courage to get into her feelings; she literally wrestled with life. She also wrestled with God, got angry with God, got angry with the church and got angry with me, but she stayed with it. And today she has come into her fullness.

These two women got beyond much of the pain that was holding them down. And the message I want to convey from them to you is: so can you! There is a way out, but it doesn't come with the snap of a finger.

The Swiss psychiatrist, Dr. Paul Tournier, who has at the very heart of his writing and his therapy a deep and abiding faith in God, has said, "Pain itself is not creative, but anybody who has ever been really creative in life has had a lot of pain and has learned how to adjust and to adapt and to overcome."

Pain itself is not creativity, but pain is the ingredient for our creativity and growth.

Several years ago I cut out of *Parade* magazine an article whose title

Janet Gnall

intrigued me: "We're Tougher Than We Think." It is about a new medical specialty pioneered in Toronto, Canada, called "survival therapy." A foundation up there deals with people who have been traumatized through tragic events, but the principles relate to all pain. There are three things the foundation recommends to help people get past the difficulties and pain resulting from the trauma:

First, as quickly as possible, talk it out. Get all your feelings on the table. Get the anger out, and do it as fast as you can. Although we generally are trained to be strong, to hold things in, psychologists have discovered that if we don't get these feelings out, if we don't flush out our system, then the problems will become compounded.

Second, never minimize the effect of the trauma. Too often we try to pass it off. Something bad will happen—we have been robbed, perhaps, or violated in some way—and we'll try to put it in perspective by saying, "Well, it could have been worse; at least I'm alive." We do this to others as well as ourselves, believing that we can soothe the hurt minimizing the trauma.

I made a mistake like that as a young chaplain intern at the Texas Medical Center, where one winter's day I met a woman who had survived the crash of a small plane in which the pilot had been killed. She had lain unconscious for eight hours in the soft snow, which had lowered her body temperature and helped her to survive the trauma.

Unfortunately I took my cue from a nurse who had told me the woman was ungrateful to be alive, so I kept telling the woman, "How lucky you are to be alive; how lucky that it snowed." But how much better I would have helped her if I had not minimized her trauma and had helped her get in touch with her fear, anger and whatever else might have resulted from her near-death experience.

The third thing the Toronto foundation recommends is, find someone else who has had that same experience or is going through a similar kind of pain. Go and just be there for him or her, because the one who has suffered knows best how somebody else is suffering. The foundation says that people in pain do much better when they help somebody else.

Isn't this the secret of Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step programs? Persons who are in it themselves are the best ones to help others. And isn't this the bottom line of Christianity? Although we think of Jesus as master of His own soul, as being wonderfully strong, He showed a different side at times. When He was tired and didn't want to

be around people anymore, He said, "Enough is enough! I have to get away for a while," and He would go outside the town to pray. And that last night in the Garden of Gethsemane was not easy for Him. He complained. It hurt for Him to be left alone and He said so. And when He was on the cross and was thirsty, He was not stoic. He said, "I am thirsty."

Weeks earlier, before He was to die, Jesus told His disciples, "I am not going to be with you anymore." He indicated what it would feel like. He said, "You are going to feel sorrow and you are going to lament. You will be in pain."

But then He said something else: "Your sorrow will turn to joy." This is where the spiritual journey is important. "Your sorrow will turn into joy, because I will be there for you in spirit."

> You never get too old. Regardless of how old you are, things can come together for you.

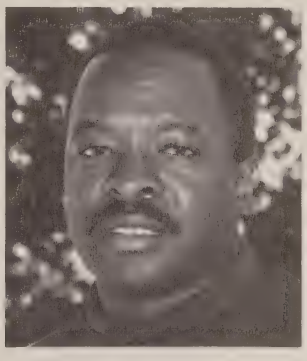
So, as we go through pain, trauma, suffering and travail, we need to remember that God not only is with us now, but He also will be with us at the other end, and He will be with us through everything in between. If we trust and believe, if we persist and are patient, our sorrow will be turned into joy.

Sure, life can hurt, but you can use your pain creatively. You are tougher than you think. You are wonderfully resilient. You can make it through by seeing God as part of your life all the way, by flushing out your emotions and feelings, and by persisting.

The human spirit has a great innate ability to deal with pain, suffering and struggle. Trust in that, and in God's presence with you, and if you are not already there, one day you will find victory over your pain—and freedom.

"There is More to Loving a Woman"

EUGENE A. BLAIR



An Afro-American minister learns through the grief of an unexpected divorce why relationships fail—and how they can work.

Let me begin with a bit of wisdom shared with me by a friend, a Black woman. It was written by that famous writer, who at this point can only be called, "author unknown."

> After a while you learn the subtle difference between holding a hand and changing a soul. And you learn that love doesn't mean leaning and company doesn't mean security. And you learn that kisses aren't contracts and presents aren't promises. And you begin to accept your defeats with your head up and your eyes open with the grace of a woman and not the grief of a child. And you learn to build all your roads on today because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for plans and futures have a way of falling in mid-flight.
>
> After a while you learn that even sunshine burns if you get too much. So you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul instead of waiting for someone else to bring you flowers. And you learn that you really can endure . . . that you really are strong . . . and you really do have worth . . . and you learn and learn . . . with every goodbye you learn.

African Americans have a special calling in terms of relationships. Learn-

An ordained minister in the United Methodist Church, Eugene Blair is the Dean of The Upper Room Chapel and Director of Church Cultivation for the General Board of Discipleship of his denomination. He is also completing a Doctor of Ministry degree in Spiritual Formation in the African American Church. A native of Cincinnati, Rev. Blair currently resides in Nashville, TN. The title of his article comes from a book of poems by John David Burton, Ontos Books.

ing how to love each other as Black men and women is second only to learning how to love God.

I am third in the line of five children and the only boy. My sisters have given me three nieces and three nephews. Sisters have a way of teaching brothers about how to love a woman. Women are strong, they do endure, they do have worth, and it seems to me, they learn faster about relationships.

I suppose the above quote could have been written for men by a man. The soundness and depth speaks to us all.

I was divorced three years ago. I was married to a beautiful Black woman. Decisions were made and actions taken that have left us no longer married. I did not want to be divorced, but I am. There were no winners or losers in this divorce, only two survivors. My spiritual journey has called me to reexamine who I am now, what has this change meant, and to ask where is God in this change.

I continue to experience God as "a balm in Gilead" that makes my woundedness whole (Jeremiah 8:22). God is the one who can melt our brokenness, hurt and disappointment into new creations. Out of our brokenness, and all of us are broken, we can find new life and new paths. My own spiritual journey continues the path which moves me from "searching" for God to "being with" God.

> Next time, I will tell her "I love you" more often. I will enjoy the little things that are joy and learn to let go of the bigger things that cause pain. I will know more about her hopes, dreams and fears. I will know what makes her smile, I mean really smile. I may never know what really makes her cry, but I can dry the tears and hold her hand.

When I think about my divorce, I no longer agonize over what I wish I had done. I have been able to rewind and erase that broken and paralyzing tape which said to me, "I wish I had . . ." In the process of facing the past and my own wounds, I am now able to say, "next time . . ."

I now examine my life, relationships and ministry with a new heart. After all, "with every good-bye you learn." With every good-bye, there is an opportunity to draw closer to God.

I have realized, again, that I am not alone in this journey. God continues to send other African American men and women into my life for

Janet Gnall

support, encouragement and prayer. If there is a common thread running through these encounters it is anger. African American men are angry. Women are angry. We are angry about the failures of our relationships.

Let me speak for the men. After all, I am one. We have a host of legitimate and justifiable reasons to be angry. They are legion. We are angry at the racists who demean us in a myriad of ways. We are angry at the fathers who failed us and our mothers for loving the men who failed us. We are angry at other African American men who point their fingers and say we should be more than who we are and have more than what we have. We are angry at ourselves for being angry. All of this has something to say about the way we love African American women.

I have learned that there is more to loving a woman. I have learned that I must first make friends with my anger and allow God to love me and my anger and melt and mold it into a positive force. Only then can I love a woman and be loved by her. Next time, maybe we can love the anger together. We must take responsibility and not find blame.

Next time, I will tell her, "I love you" more often. I will enjoy the little

things that are joy and learn to let go of the bigger things that cause pain. I will know more about her hopes, dreams, and fears. I will know what makes her smile, I mean really smile. I may never know what really makes her cry, but I can dry the tears and hold her hand.

Next time, I will talk less and listen more, especially when I do not want to. I will ask more questions and give fewer answers. I will seek to know this Black woman. Next time, I will accept the gifts of today and remember that "tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for plans and futures have a way of falling down in mid-flight." I will remember the mistakes of the past as just that, the past.

I will remember my own brokenness and healing. I will call upon the richness of my own garden and soul as a Black man on a journey between America and Africa. For this life of mine is a gift from God and a Black woman.

> After a while you learn that even sunshine burns if you get too much. So you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul instead of waiting for someone to bring you flowers. And you learn that you really can endure . . . that you really are strong . . . and you really do have worth . . . and you learn and learn . . . with every goodbye you learn.

In my ministry, I find myself reflecting on the elusiveness of mutuality in our relationships. Contemporary magazines tell us that if we use modern or new age communication techniques and practice good sex, we will have it all together. This has been lifeless and frustrating for us because we continue to ignore the major issue of spirituality in our relationships.

Mutuality must be grounded in the God who loves us and prays for us. Human love and commitment to each other begins with the scriptural understanding of "hospitality" to self, others and God. We must cultivate an "open space" in our lives to love ourselves and to receive others. The result is a love focused on each other's spiritual journey and well-being.

Without hospitality and that open space in our lives, we have no room to receive the gift of relationship and we cannot love ourselves or others. We will continue the patterns of failure, despair, and certainly anger. In the final analysis, loving God and one another is the task of all humankind and the hope of all our relationships.

Tom Dunham

I have learned that African American men and women really can endure, that we are strong and that we do have worth. The task of creating new ways to love and understand each other is up to us.

Cycles of Life

Lord, it is time. The summer was very big.
Lay thy shadow on the sundials,
and on the meadows let the winds go loose.

Command the last fruits that they shall be full,
give them another two more southerly days,
press them on to fulfillment and drive
the last sweetness into the heavy wine.

Who has no house now, will build him one no more.
Who is alone now, long will so remain,
will wake, read, write long letters
and will in the avenues to and fro
restlessly wander, when the leaves are blowing.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Farewell

Farewell, my younger brother.
From the high, holy places
The Gods have come for me.
You will never see me again.
But when the showers pass over you,
And the thunder sounds,
You will think:
There is the voice of my elder brother.
And when the harvests ripen,
And you hear the voices of small birds of many kinds,

And the chirping of the grasshoppers,
You will think:
There is the ordering of my elder brother.
There is the trail of his mind.

Traditional Navajo Poetry

Woven Holy

Like silk,
her hair lay before the moonlight, every golden strand
silhouetted
against the warm milky light
it was just a vision—in the night—of past visions—of delight.

As it were, she was like a petal, floating atop the quiet pond
aimlessly, without intent
longing—for her quest, she reached up
like the flower, toward the sun
her face before the universe, basked in the Holy One.

She did not know, where her petal face shone.

The silk, the golden silk lay now across the sepal bare,
weaving around it some semblance of purpose there.

And this was she, that the petal now bore,
her one delight, her infinite soul.

And so she looked up to the moon again
and wove among her pollen love,

the beautiful words

Amen.

Tracy Marsh

"There is a God"

FANNIE PECZENIK

A visit to the Roman catacombs takes a surprising turn when an elderly tour guide speaks from his heart.

Seven years ago, a few days into a trip to Rome, my husband suggested at breakfast that we visit S. Agnese fuori le Mura, St. Agnes outside the walls. The church had much to recommend it. First of all, it was an excellent example of the paleo-Christian style which we prefer to the adornments of later ages. Even better, from my point of view, were the catacombs beneath the church. On our previous trip to Rome, while my husband went walking on the Appian Way, I was forced to stay in the hotel nursing a bad case of Roman tummy, reading Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*, and suffering from a severe sense of deprivation. What was the use of going to Rome if you couldn't see the catacombs?

Looking out of the window as the bus went down via Nomentana, I was a little disappointed to find that outside its walls, Rome became unfamiliar. The streets were bland, a little too wide, a little too regular, no longer intrinsically Roman. We were now in a city no different from other cities, planned and built according to nineteenth and twentieth century ideas of comfort and convenience. Even the cats, lounging in the morning sun, looked ordinary; they had nothing of the swagger of the cats who inhabit the Forum and the Colisseum.

We found the church, walked around it to study the facade, and then went inside. There we descended a long ramplike staircase until we found ourselves in the basilica. The naves were constructed from an assortment of lovely columns, borrowed, no doubt, from the ruins of nearby Roman buildings. As our guidebook indicated, the chapels to the right and left were not exceptional and the ceiling was made of the inevitable carved, gilded wood. The mosaic in the apse was striking, however. Starker than most, it had little of the usual pretty display of plants and animals. In the center stood St. Agnes, her arms folded over her

Fannie Peczenik writes on Milton's Paradise Lost, *translates Yiddish poetry, and is presently working on a volume of short stories. She lives in Frascati, Italy, with her husband and two cats.*

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Janet Gnall

breast, flames and a sword at her feet. She was flanked by two other saints and well above her, through a field of stars, a wreathed hand reached down toward her head. The three figures stood in ceremonious, Byzantine composure, but St. Agnes' wide, almond shaped eyes and small mouth gave her a slight look of surprise.

Drawing on the story of St. Agnes given in the guidebook, I expounded to my husband, who is not well-versed in hagiography, "Poor Agnes. That's not even her name. Her real name has been forgotten. Some important Roman got interested in her, and she refused him because she was a Christian, so he had her stripped naked to disgrace her. But a miracle happened. All of a sudden her hair grew so long that it covered her like a robe. That presumably happened in Piazza Navona, where the other church of S. Agnese is. Then he had her thrown into a fire but she walked out of that unharmed. Finally, and he must have been pretty desperate by then, he succeeded in beheading her with a sword. Some men don't know how to take no for an answer."

"Do you have any idea why she got saved twice but not the third time?"

"No, but come to think of it, most of the saints follow that pattern. A

miraculous survival or two and then they're done for. It's curious. I should look it up somewhere."

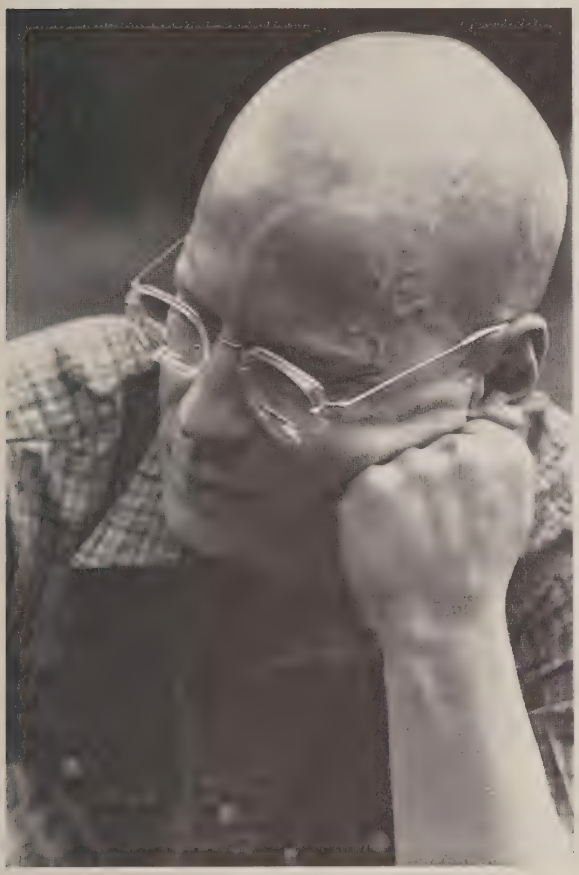
When we had finished with the interior, we bought tickets and went down the narrow stone steps into the catacombs. Several other people, whom we had noticed in the church, were already there: a mild-looking couple somewhere in their early sixties, two young men whose bedraggled jeans and t-shirts argued that they were almost certainly students, and a long-faced woman in a beige dress and sensible shoes. The lighting was bad and the air stale and damp, so I was ready to start walking around quickly on my own when our guide appeared. A short, wiry, grey-haired man in a worn suit and a cap, he greeted us with a smile and a barrage of words somewhat identifiable as English, German, and French.

He had guessed right on the languages, but after a second's consideration, my husband and I decided we would fare a lot better with our Italian than his English. "It is not necessary to speak English to us. We are studying Italian. *Parli italiano, per favore.*"

He agreed to speak Italian, but reminded us that at any time, he was ready to translate into English. Taking a flashlight out of his pocket, he began to lead us through the twists and turns of the tunnels, all the while describing the age of the tombs and the burial customs. He showed us the artless carvings on the graves: *un pesce, ein fisch* (he said it with a slight hint of a vowel at the end), *un poisson.*

Meanwhile, I began to lose patience with the close air. I had not counted on how suffocating a subterranean burial ground, unused for many centuries, could be. And even worse, someone in the group, probably one of the students, was egregiously unbathed. The stench of damp earth and sweat made me regret my enthusiasm for the catacombs. Dickens of S. Agnese *inside* the walls, unfortunate baroque creation that it is, were probably better, and pleasanter, choices. I took as few breaths as I could and waved a tissue around in a vain attempt to clear the air.

I looked at the other people in our touring party. They were studying the catacombs very intently, their faces betraying no sign of discomfort. Perhaps I was the only one who found the place intolerable. Our guide certainly did not. Indeed he seemed to relish everything, the gloom, the bad air, the graves, the peculiar sounds of the foreign words which he rolled off his tongue. The two students crowded around him to ask detailed questions. He answered them at length, reinforcing his words with



energetic gestures and refining, I thought, the well-known Italian tolerance for the eccentricities of foreigners into a sublime art form. By then I had decided that I was no longer interested in ancient graves in an undistinguished part of the city, so I amused myself by watching his performance.

At last, when he judged that we had seen a good sample of the catacombs, he allowed us to re-emerge into the church. He bid the group farewell, still in their native languages, and we thanked him and parted.

My husband and I stayed in the church for a few minutes, taking a last look at the mosaic before we left. I, for one, wanted to make sure that we put plenty of space between ourselves and the two students so that we wouldn't run the risk of taking the same bus back to the center of the city with them.

Outside, once again in the clear sunlight, we almost didn't recognize our guide, who approached us with a smile. His features were precise; he had wrinkles carved into his face.

"*Loro sono inglesi?* You are English?"

"*No, siamo americani.* No, we're Americans."

"Ah," it seemed to explain something to him.

"*La chiesa e' molto bella*" I volunteered. "The church is very beautiful."

Without answering, he looked straight at me. "*Lei crede in Dio?* Do you believe in God?"

The conversation had taken a turn I wasn't prepared for. "No," I began to say with a smile, shaking my head, "I'm sorry but I don't."

My husband, more tactful, interrupted me. "*Forse*, perhaps. We don't know."

The guide continued to look directly at me. "*C'é Dio*. There is a God. I'm an old man. I've lived a long time. I know. *C'é Dio*."

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What is a Good Death?

WILLIAM M. STEPHENS

Do we have a right to refuse medical treatment? Is suicide ever justifiable? Challenging questions arise as this lawyer searches for an ethical and spiritual approach to death.

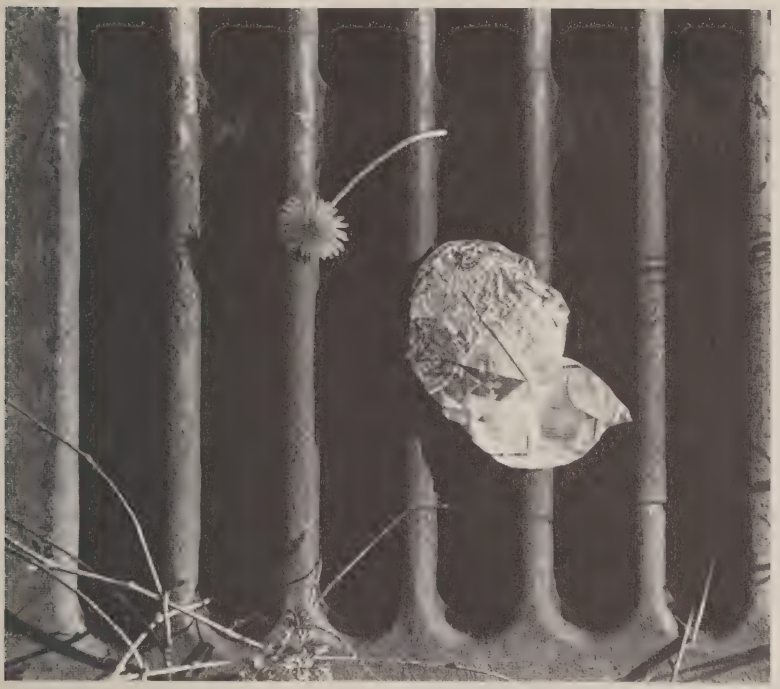
Aristotle said that the value of a person's life cannot be assessed until the life has been completed. I used to worry about that a lot. Is he saying that a living person can *never* be sure that he or she has lived a good life? Must death always come first? If that is true, then the manner in which we die must be a lot more important than most of us believe.

Ernest Hemingway, in his books, told us how to assess the value of a man's death. (I doubt if he would have applied the same standards to women.) Hemingway believed that a good death was one that blew a man away while he was still at the height of his physical and mental powers. Hemingway had nothing but contempt for someone who lacked the courage to die with his shoulders squared and a grin or a sneer on his face. Of course, Ernest Hemingway himself may have been the best character he ever created. I wonder if he thought he was dying the good death when he put the muzzle of his shotgun to his head.

I recently heard about a man who starved himself to death at the age of 100. His name was Scott Nearing, and, like Hemingway, he also wrote books. However, these two gentlemen probably had very little else in common. As Nearing's wife Helen tells it, Scott Nearing never got old until he was well over 90. Until then, he worked very hard, homesteading and building his own home, first in Vermont and then in Maine, where he and Helen constructed, fashioned, or grew everything they needed to make a good and complete life. They loved and respected the earth and its creatures, and avoided big cities.

Scott and Helen Nearing had no use for doctors, pills, or hospitals. Together, they wrote more than 40 books, including *Living the Good Life* and *Continuing the Good Life*. They felt that the practice of health was a viable alternative to the practice of medicine. They planned to write a book called *We Practice Health*, but they never got around to it. They

A regular contributor to FiP, *William M. Stephens practices law in Brentwood, TN.*



enjoyed music, art, the inner life, good company, conversation, books, and each other.

At the age of 98, Scott Nearing still split his own firewood and carried it into the house to keep the stove going. But at 99, he had to give it up. He felt helpless and useless as he watched his wife doing all the chores without his help. One day he said, "I don't think I will eat anymore."

She said, "All right. I understand. I think I would do that too. Animals know when to stop. They go off in a corner and leave off food." So Scott stopped eating solid food. For the next month or so, Helen gave him lots of juices—carrot juice, apple juice, all kinds—and he became "as gaunt and thin as Gandhi." Then, four or five days after his 100th birthday, he told her he would drink no more juice. All he wanted was water.

That's all he took from then on, and he lasted another ten days. He was too weak to get out of bed, but he remained conscious and he talked with Helen every day. On the last day, she sat beside him on the bed. Just the two of them. No doctors, nurses, pills, tubes or hypodermic

needles. She sensed he was ready to go, and she said, "It's all right, Scott. Go right along. You've lived a good life and are finished with things here. Go on and up. Up into the light. We love you and let you go. It's all right."

He said softly, "All . . . right," and began breathing slower and slower until "there was no movement anymore and he was gone out of his body as easily as a leaf drops from the tree in autumn, slowly twisting and falling to the ground." This was on the morning of August 24, 1983.

I would like to have known Scott Nearing. He must have been a very special human being. I don't know what Aristotle or Hemingway would have said, but, by my definition, Scott Nearing lived a good life . . . and a good death.

Let me add that I am opposed in principle to both suicide and euthanasia. Only rarely, if ever, is either course justified. They are against the law, to start with. Besides that, I feel they are contrary to divine law, which tells us we must accept the natural consequences of our own acts. As we sow, so shall we reap, the Bible tells us, in both the Old and New Testaments. In India, this universal law is known as *karma*. Action-reaction. Cause and effect. Everything we send out comes back to us in kind. If you plant poison ivy, you don't harvest strawberries.

Looking at it from a spiritual point of view, I believe God placed each of us in our present situation because this is precisely what we need at this moment. The way we handle each challenge and each setback determines our spiritual development. As Avatar Meher Baba said, "Take it for a blessing, or take it for a test; whatever happens, happens for the best."

I also believe that there are good suicides and bad suicides. An act to accelerate death by one who has clearly finished his or her work on earth, and who has no remaining desire but to pass "into the light," is not, by my way of thinking, a "bad" act. At the opposite extreme is the self-destructive act of a person who cannot face the punishment that comes as a natural result of his unbridled lust, anger, or greed. The suicide of such a person is an act of cowardice.

As a lawyer, I would point out that the law makes a clear distinction between acts of omission and acts of commission. The right to refuse medical treatment is both a legal and moral right of every adult citizen of sound mind. It is not the same as suicide, which is a crime in every state of the union.

I'm not at all sure I could follow Scott Nearing's example, even though

Tom Dunham

I *am* convinced that the manner in which we pass out of this world may be just as important as the way we come into it. Even more so, perhaps. If consciousness does in fact transcend the death of the physical body, isn't it possible we might suffer pangs of regret and remorse if we have not lived up to the moral values we have set for ourselves. If we have given up too easily and taken the easy way out, hopping on the train before our baggage has all been loaded, might we not experience a sense of incompleteness that could interfere with our enjoyment of heavenly vistas, angelic hosts, the music of the spheres, or even the Living Presence of God, depending upon our beliefs, experience, desires, and the state of our consciousness?

But if, on the other hand, we are fortunate to have the courage, good fortune, or grace to pass through the portals of the soul without fear, enmity, or regret, isn't it possible we will experience incomparable bliss and light on the other side of the curtain?

I hope so. Finding out will be the climax of a great adventure—the adventure of our life.

Money Matters on Dharma's Path

REV. PALANISWAMI

Americans pile up debts, refuse to save money, and push credit cards to their limit. Must we go on "mortgaging our future," or could we try an ancient Hindu solution to the problem?

We were impressed years ago to find corporate America spending millions to teach sales personnel about the hottest new negotiation strategy to hit the streets—win-win negotiation techniques. "Wait just a minute," we thought. "That's nothing new. That's a repackaging of the old Hindu business ethic of assuring that each side in every business transaction is benefitted." We thumbed through the 2,200-year-old couplets of Saint Tiruvalluvar, the wily weaver poet from Madras, and found this win-win counsel: "Those businessmen will prosper whose business protects as their own the interests of others."

It's not easy to prosper in today's world. It's hard to make ends meet these days. Food costs are up, houses sell for more than it cost to build Udaipur's Lake Palace. People need help. Help about how to make money. Help on how to spend it wisely. Too few seem to have the innate discipline to follow the wise weaver's other admonition: "A small income is not cause for failure, provided expenses do not exceed it." How much of your life is tied up in working for food, housing, clothing, transportation and health care? Probably a lot. Probably more than you would like.

There are two important ways that tradition helps. One is a personal lifestyle that is economically efficient. Indian thought and custom is replete with the ideal of simplicity. Rama and Sita lived in the forest for years. Mahatma Gandhi personally followed the ideal, requiring only bare necessities. Sanatana Dharma offers a lifestyle that is relatively undemanding by directing its followers toward simplicity (even wealthy people can and do live simply). The teachings tell us we can harness our appetites, restrain our needs for things, forget about keeping up with the Joneses next door and focus on the greater matters of life.

The Editor of Hinduism Today, *Rev. Palaniswami has been an initiated sannyasin for 22 years and lives at a Hindu monastery in Hawaii on the banks of a sacred river, near a volcano. To subscribe to* Hinduism Today, *write to 1819 Second St., Concord, CA 94519.*

Dharma's second law of economy states that a two parent household is wasteful. It opts instead for the extended or joint family. This is the way most humans lived until recently. They did it because it works, because it has survival power. People in Africa, India, China, Arabia and pre-Columbus America lived in large cooperative units. Industrialization changed that, and today the nuclear family—one married couple and its children—is the norm.

Just as Americans discovered the win-win negotiations, I believe they will rediscover the wisdom of the extended family. There is one couple in Vancouver, Canada, which has caught the vision. Gyan Nath is from India and his wife Jyan is from Fiji. Both were raised in extended families, so they know the advantages and disadvantages. They founded *FAST*, Families and Spiritual Teachings, which brings about six families together in loosely-knit associations which "aim to make the family stronger than its problems." Members don't all live under the same roof and their commonality is spiritual and interest-based rather than by blood ties, but they cooperate in very practical ways.

They estimate that there is a 40% financial savings in such an arrangement. How? Members purchase cooperatively to reduce food costs. Where there is illness in the group, they care for one another. That translates into fewer medical expenses, and no need for hiring nurses or

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maids. "There is more support and thus less divorce in an extended family," Mrs. Nath told *HINDUISM TODAY*, "They work on conflict resolution and avoid the expensive legal fees involved in divorce." When members of the extended family travel, they have access to homes of people who know and trust the group. Hotel bills, which look more like ransom notes, are avoided. Money is saved. In Concord, California, the newly formed Extended Family Association meets monthly. They plan to rent condos in the same building, maintain family independence but share many things.

The nuclear family of the modern West is under stress in part because it is an inefficient system. Two people must have one car, or two cars if they both work to keep the family solvent. In an extended family, one car can provide transportation for 6 to 8 people, or more. In a nuclear family there is one kitchen, one laundry area, one lawnmower and one refrigerator per couple. In an extended family (which does not always dwell together) many things can be shared. Money is saved. No need for child care. Auntie will baby-sit. There is a sharing of expertise. Instead of calling a $50-per-hour plumber or electrician, members can often do it themselves. Insurance premiums drop, heating costs plummet. The bottom line looks good.

"A small income is not cause for failure, provided expenses do not exceed it."

Ashrams are the perfect example of this model. In an ashram people come together for a spiritual purpose. They share responsibilities, they help one another, they seek simplicity in their needs. The financial benefits of living in an ashram or any spiritual community of like structure—a Catholic convent or a Jewish Kibbutz—are similar. Permanent residents in US-based Hindu communities enjoy healthful, effective and abundant lives. Yet, they spend much less than most people. There is a lesson in this. India's extended family and ashram models both have a place in the 21st century. I predict that someone will develop this concept fully and the world will be better off. At the very least, perhaps more people will embrace ashram life, recognizing its many rewards. Remember, in an extended family or ashram someone else gets to worry about paying the bills.

Sunday Morning at the Bakery

AVIS CROWE

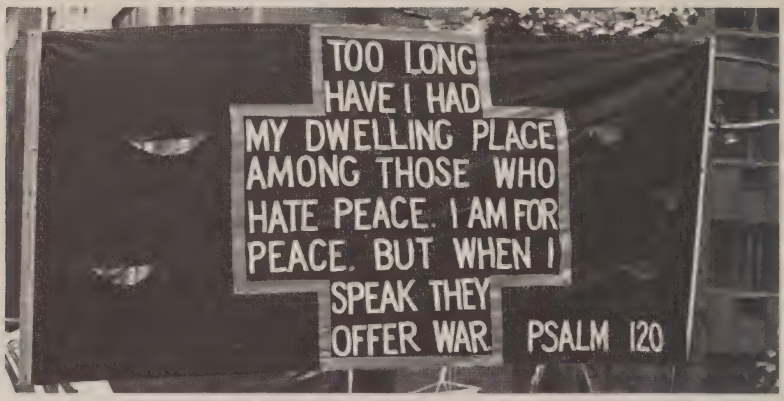
"I cannot deny the darkness of the world, . . . but faith makes it possible for me not to have to dwell there." Dismayed by the never-ending wars raging on our planet, this writer found God's presence in tiny blue jeans and a pair of purple Mary Janes.

During the week the local bakery was a routine stop after our morning swim: we never went on Sundays. But one weekend when my husband was away I decided to stop for a muffin and coffee on my way into town for worship at the Quaker Meeting house. It turned out to be one of those "holy nudges" that quickens my faith and reminds me that God can be found in the most ordinary place and mundane circumstance.

I was feeling at odds on this particular Sunday, unsure of my reaction to what was happening in the Persian Gulf. Friends talked of rage at our government: sadness at once again choosing violence over negotiation, and fear for the inevitable cost in lives and funds diverted from pressing needs here at home. I too, was discouraged and saddened. Yet something else was working in me: feelings were stirring inside that seemed contrary to what I was hearing all around me and thus hard to admit.

A few days before I had been with several women who shared their anguish about the war in the Persian Gulf. I had gone home unsettled in mind and heart, vaguely ashamed that I did not feel the anguish they were clearly experiencing. I had moved through the weekend slowly, weighted by my own confusion about what was going on—both in the world, and within me. I carried this unease with me into the bakery, and it hovered over me as I sipped my coffee and tried to concentrate on the words of a book I had brought along. My attention strayed to a little girl at the next table. She couldn't have been more than two. She wore a too-big black T-shirt decorated with electric pink and green heiroglyphs: it was tucked into blue jeans. Beneath the cuffed pants her small feet were shod in purple canvas Mary Janes. Kneeling on the chair, she looked around, taking in her surroundings, nibbling occasionally at a large

Avis Crowe is a staff writer for Radical Grace, *the newspaper of the Center for Action and contemplation in Albuquerque, NM.*



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white sugar cookie that just fit into the palm of her hand. The man with her I assumed to be her daddy . . . dark, good looking, totally absorbed in the Sunday paper while absentmindedly sipping coffee and munching on a roll. He reached over now and then to stroke his daughter's cheek or run his fingers through the soft, brown flyaway hair that framed her round, pale face. Angel hair, I thought to myself. Soon she climbed down from her perch and moved slowly through a forest of chairs taller than she was to a display case near me. She stood for a long time, staring in wonder at the sample birthday cakes with their fancy decorations. I had always dismissed these as "kitsch," the plastic figures looking as though they had come out of a cracker jack box. They were placed in scenes made of grotesquely colored icing that did nothing for my own appetite. But on this morning I saw these ridiculous confections through a child's eyes, and for a moment the tacky comic book characters and circus figures evoked enchanted kingdoms.

Something began to soften in me as though a knot was coming undone. The dis-ease I had been feeling was replaced with a restful peace. A little girl I had never seen before and would probably never see again was responsible for this inner shift. Tiring, finally, of looking at the cakes, she turned and started to retrace her steps. As she passed my table, she paused for a split second, aware that I was watching her: her wide, doe-like eyes met mine cautiously, with just the hint of a smile that felt like a caress. Satisfied, she went on, pausing by her father to reassure herself of his presence and to take a bite of her cookie, before moving off

in the opposite direction. During all of this she never said a word, or made the kind of fuss and noisy chatter I associate with small children in public places.

I had given up any pretense of reading to watch this enchanted youngster extending her boundaries and testing her ability to move about on her own. I could so easily have felt despair about her future in the wake of the war and our continuing wrongful choices. Yet observing her and looking at the universe through her eyes on an ordinary Sunday morning brought me back instead to wonder and possibility.

I cannot deny the darkness of the world, or my own distress about what happened in the Gulf and continues to happen in the aftermath of the war. But faith makes it possible for me not to dwell there: it helps me to continually reaffirm God's presence in the midst of ALL things. I am grateful to a young father for bringing his daughter with him that morning. A divine prompting brought me out of my normal routine and into that same neighborhood bakery where hope and inner peace were waiting for me in the beguiling innocence of a wide-eyed little girl in blue jeans and purple shoes.

Ask Angela

BARBARA ACKERMAN

Do you have a question of the heart or spirit that needs attention? Angela, our canine sage-in-residence, would love to help. Please write to her in care of FiP, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542, and she will give you her answer in our next issue.

Dear Angela,

Recently a very good friend of mine passed away. Could you share with us your thoughts concerning the grieving process? Thank you.

Sincerely,
At a Loss

Dear At a Loss,

Please accept my deepest sympathy regarding the loss of your friend. The death of a beloved is certainly one of the gravest trials each of us must face at one time or another. I too have experienced just such a loss. My housemate and comrade Captain also passed away. He and I shared Kibbles for thirteen of my fourteen years. In recent years, Cappy provided me with an extra pair of eyes and ears and a reliable extra nose as well. Captain was my efficient and good-natured executive secretary. He handled all things bright and earthly, leaving me free to ponder parables.

Although at present I am in the thick of my own grief work, I can share with you what I've discovered about the five stages of grief we need to live through to reach the sixth stage, called "acceptance."

The first stage of grief I refer to as "search and sniff." This occurs in the first few days after a loss. Outside you sniff fervently everywhere and visit all your old haunts and beloved resting places. You're convinced that your friend is not gone for good but just merely misplaced. Your friend is lost, and you are going to sniff till you find him and bring him home. You are further convinced that this search-and-sniff mission will be more fruitful than the one you had earlier in the day. Upon your return, you search expectantly in every room, hoping to find that your friend has indeed returned home in your absence. The outside search-and-sniff missions will continue for a number of days, but you may enter a new phase on the home front. Like I did, you may begin eating for two. Here you

have a big dish of food that you used to have to share, but now you don't. You feel lost leaving it all, so you stuff more in to compensate. Another variation, of course, is not eating at all.

The second stage I refer to as "taking to your bed." Nothing complicated here: when grieving, frequent naps are vital. Napping helps restore the soul. Grief, coping, and disbelief take their toll. You need a place to escape to and get away from it all. Napping is it. After my own unsuccessful search-and-sniff missions, I would be tired and upset. I would curl up small on a big red pillow that Cappy and I always shared. It was here on the pillow that I sensed Cappy's presence most keenly.

Now we enter the two noisy stages of grief. I call the third stage "yowling in the basement" *or* "howling at the moon"—take your pick. In this stage, you find yourself a quiet corner where you will be free to disturb yourself and others with yowling and howling. Making noises is the most thorough and efficient way of being with your grief and misery ***and*** allowing it to pass through you so you can once again experience quieter times. Noises cleanse the spirit. In this stage, you may also experience guilt. You are here, but your beloved is not. Perhaps if you had only been kinder or nicer or bigger or smaller or fatter or shorter, you might have been able to alter the final outcome. I yowled in the basement for a num-

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ber of days. I felt guilty. Perhaps if I had stolen just *one less* dish of macaroni-and-cheese sauce from Captain, he would still be with us. Feeling guilty is universal and natural. Feel it till you tire yourself out and then get over it so you can move on to the next noisy stage: barking at the mailman. This stage is one of anger and rage. Why has this happened? Why has this happened to *my* friend? Why am I left? It is important to mutter and moan, necessary to scream and shout. Barking at the mailman from behind a closed door may not be nice, but as long as no one gets hurt it is an excellent way to vent some rage. Keep in mind the barking is a far cry from biting, however. Expressing our rage isn't bad as long as we do not hurt ourselves or others.

The fifth stage of grief I refer to as intermittent wagging. In this stage, you are able to experience pleasure for short periods of time. I experience this when my friend Barbara comes to call for me. I wag when I see her because I am glad and relieved that something has remained steadfastly the same even though Captain's death has turned my life upside down. Intermittent wagging is a hopeful stage: with just a bit more howling and yowling, acceptance—or full-fledged wagging—is just around the corner.

With full-fledged wagging, though your life has been forever altered you begin to notice once again that the wind smells sweet. There is pleasure to be had and you are willing to sniff it out. I engage in full-fledged wagging when eating my Cheerios. I am able to be a Cheerios party animal. I couldn't be if I hadn't gone through each stage of my grief work. I encourage all of you who need love and support to take your own steps, at your own pace.

To all of you in the grip of grief, I hold you in my thoughts and prayers.

Faithfully,
Angela

We welcome your comments. Please send them to the Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 291 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ 08542.

For years I have enjoyed and benefited from *FiP*, but this is the first time I have let you know how much it has meant. Your offer to start a formation of spiritual communities by mail motivates me to ask that you add my name and address to the list.

Your readers might be interested to know about the International Thomas Merton Society. People read and study Thomas Merton in groups of five or six and keep in touch by means of a round-robin letter. One group has a member living in Ireland; another someone in Canada. This organization "Friends of Merton—the Wider Fellowship," is primarily for people who have no group in their immediate location. Members grow quite close and have an opportunity to meet each other at general meetings of the International Thomas Merton Society.

Please include me in your Interfaith Network. If your members would like to belong to a "Friends of Merton" group, they are welcome to contact me at 1801 E. Manor Dr., Lincoln, NE 68506.

Arline Newton; Lincoln, NE

Please add my name to your Interfaith Network. I am an Afro-American priest living in a small parish of three hundred families. We are a praying people who want to bring all people together and closer to God. We need your prayers as we commit ourselves to pray for you and your needs and to share insights about prayer and meditation, about the Bible, the Koran, the spiritual writings of Hinduism, Buddhism, and the other great religions of the world. I believe that it is time to pray and work for world peace, justice, love of all peoples in all lands—to end racism, sexism, hatred of others' religions, and all injustice. Let us pray for each other.

Rev. Louis C. Delarue; Orange, TX

I came across your journal at the Washington Retreat House recently, and it is just beautiful. Please find a check enclosed for a subscription.

Laura Perra; Burke, VA

I read and re-read each issue of *Fellowship in Prayer*, and share it with friends. All your articles are remarkable in their enrichment of my life.

M. M. Collinson; Burke, VA

Would that you published monthly! May God continue to bless you all in your endeavors.

Lauder Greenway II; Bethesda, MD

I am enclosing a check for a subscription to your excellent publication. I have been reading *Fellowship in Prayer* regularly for some time, as it was passed on to me by a friend. In turn, I passed it on to other friends, which meant a goodly audience for your excellent messages. I have tried several magazines of this type and truly feel yours is the most useful. I intend to have my own copy from now on. Begin my subscription with the most recent issue, please. And yes, my copy will be circulating among friends. Some may even decide they need their own and subscribe. At any rate, we will all be enjoying the messages.

Rosanne Bridgham; Centralia, WA

Please continue sending me this wonderful devotional. It is one of my greatest sources of strength.

Marion Da Silva; Ontario, Canada

My discovery of your publication has been a blessing! The energy of the Spirit flows through every picture, poem, and prose piece. Even the variety is a gift of the Spirit. May God continue to bless your great generosity.

S. Vincentius Zimmer; Chicago, IL

Thank you so much for the copy of *Fellowship in Prayer*. It was good to read a publication in which many different avenues to the Divine are being honored. I have nothing but praise for such an enterprise.

Eleanor Rae, Ph.D., Vice President, the North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology; San Francisco, CA

I *love FiP*!

V. Redfield; Palm Beach Gardens, FLA

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